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ABSTRACT

Field experience has long been considered a valuable component to the professional development of prospective teachers. This paper describes a program to determine whether consistent training and support of the participants in supervised field experiences would impact the overall achievement of prospective teachers and increase each participant's satisfaction with the experience. The program was implemented at 2 universities over a 2-year period, with approximately 30 elementary and secondary student teachers and their cooperating teachers, and 5 university supervisors. Training topics address three main areas: goals and expectations of the teacher education program, roles and responsibilities of each participant, and critical aspects of supervision (conferences, observation strategies, and feedback). Cooperating teachers and university supervisors conducted weekly "formal" observations of their assigned preservice teachers, and student teachers conducted peer observations. Study results indicated increased involvement among all participants: university supervisors made more frequent contacts with cooperating teachers, addressing issues and problems as well as discussing the progress of student teachers; cooperating teachers felt less isolated; and student teachers experienced less anxiety in observations. The outcomes of the supervision process--the feedback--seemed to be enhanced. Findings of the study suggested that it is possible to prepare field-based participants for an experience that encourages taking supervised instructional risks, communicates realistic expectations, and provides developmentally appropriate feedback. (Contains 36 references.) (ND)

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Revisiting a Step-child Supervision in Teacher Education

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Revisiting a Step-child:
Supervision in Teacher Education

Introduction

Field experience in teacher education programs have long been considered a valuable component to the professional development of prospective teachers (Brimfield & Leonard, 1983; Conant, 1963; Silberman, 1970). If recent reform proposals and state legislation trends requiring more hours of field experience are valid indicators, field experiences will continue to hold an increasing portion of the total teacher preparation program (Metcalf, 1991). As this trend continues, there is increasing concern over the outcomes of field experiences. Although even the critics of increased hours of field experience required for teacher certification agree that these opportunities for practice provide great potential for learning, they are quick to point out the problems: field experiences are plagued with imitation, subservience, and conformity (Holmes Group, 1986); they promote conservatism (Lortie, 1975); they emphasize product over process (Goodman, 1985); and field experiences often support the status quo (Zeichner, 1980). The question then is, why? If the potential is there, why is it not realized more consistently? The finger is often pointed at the supervisory practices employed, the maligned and frequently ignored step-child in teacher education.

The university supervisor and the cooperating teacher each, theoretically, can have a strong influence on the growth and development of the pre-service teacher, but little research has been conducted regarding the influence of the university supervisor on the professional development of pre-service teachers. Bowman (1979) suggested after reviewing several studies

that university supervisor's effectiveness was so insignificant that it should be discontinued while others have found that the university supervisor generally complement the cooperating teacher and performs a useful function (Alverman, 1981; Becher & Ade, 1982; Friebus, 1977). Training of university supervisors is seldom addressed in the literature. Three studies, cited in Zahoric (1988), described the work of the university supervisor, but do not describe how the work is accomplished (Zimpher, et al, 1980; Koehler, 1984; and Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1982).

The influence of cooperating teachers, on the other hand, is quite clear in the literature. Griffin, et al. (1983) found that supervision by the cooperating teacher dominates. In addition, the literature clearly indicates the cooperating teachers as the one person who has the greatest influence on a student teacher's professional development (McIntyre, 1984; Guyton, 1989; Karmos & Jacko, 1977; Korinek, 1989). Further, it is also evident in the literature that cooperating teachers are generally unprepared for the task of student teaching supervision (Grimmitt and Ratzlaff, 1986; Lewis, 1990). Few receive any training or support beyond written materials and/or a single orientation session. This lack of training for cooperating teachers results in prospective teachers working with supervisors who are not familiar with the teacher education program knowledge base or goals and are unable to link the theory presented in campus-based courses with the practices followed in the classroom (Heathington, Cagle, & Banks, 1988). Without sufficient orientation and training, cooperating teachers frequently have unrealistic expectations (Sparks & Brodeur, 1987) and are tentative about the kinds of feedback they give to the developing professional under their supervision (Morehead & Waters, 1987).

If there is a lack of clarity in the literature regarding who carries out what roles and responsibilities and how it is accomplished, it follows that pre-service teachers have even less

security about what to expect from supervision. Yet, if supervision in teacher education is the vehicle by which practicing teachers and university teacher educators help students learn about teaching, then participants must possess the requisite knowledge and skills associated with effective supervision. Teacher-educators, as the delivery agent in teacher preparation, must provide the training and support necessary to realize the potential for learning during field experiences. This article, therefore, will describe a program of training which addresses the unique challenges of pre-service teacher education supervision and the imbedded support network which facilitates effective supervision.

Training Program

The key players in clinical field experiences include the teacher education student (*student teacher*), the teacher education program representative (*university or college supervisor)* and the practicing teacher *(cooperating teacher).* This training program was implemented at two universities over a two year period for both early field and student teaching experiences, with approximately 30 student teachers (25 enrolled in an elementary education program and 4 enrolled in a secondary English education program) and their cooperating teachers . In addition five 6 university supervisors also received training.

In order for the student teaching ***triad*** to work effectively, we believe that each member is critical in the professional development of pre-service teachers and should not only know about the various processes used in supervision, but they should also have a voice in the process. To that end, a training program was developed to integrate each participant into the supervisory process. The program consisted of both small group and individual instruction. In addition, as part of the initial training all members of the triad listened to the audio-tape developed to

reinforce and support the initial training meetings. Further, a written guide to all aspects of supervision discussed in the audio-tape was also provided, allowing for diverse learning styles - both verbal and visual - during this critical training. Follow-up informal meetings gave opportunities to discuss issues and/or problems associated with the supervision process; these meetings took the form of regular filed-based seminars and individual conversations.

The training topics address three main areas: the goals and expectations of the teacher education program, the roles and responsibilities of each participant, and critical aspects of the supervision process (*conferencing, observation strategies, and feedback)*. The focus of *goals and expectations* includes several sub-topics: 1) the types of field experiences previously taken and where this field experience fits into the teacher education program sequence; 2) the goals of the field experience and the teacher education program; 3) the expectations for the field experience and/or state standards for student teaching; 4) the triad relationship; and 5) the developmental stages of the student teachers. Each participant's *roles and responsibilities* are included in the training, including: 1) the student teacher as observers, assistants and learning-teachers; 2) the field-based supervisor or cooperating teacher, as teacher and guide (mentor), providing guidance, feedback and support; and 3) the university supervisor as liaison, mentor and evaluator. Finally, the training topic which was central to the discussions, *the supervision processes,* addresses three steps generally used with pre-service teachers, *pre-observation conferencing, observation, and post-observation conferencing.* In addition, at least three specific observation strategies are introduced and levels of feedback demonstrated. The observation strategies explained, demonstrated, and to some degree practiced, include *selective verbatim, verbal flow* (Wentzlaff, 1991), and *the bug-in-the-ear [guided action]* (Giebelhaus, 1994).

Each participant in the triad is trained to play an active role in the supervision of the pre-service teachers. Cooperating teachers and university supervisors conduct weekly "formal" observations of their assigned pre-service teachers using the three step approach - pre-observation conferencing, observation, and post-observation conferencing. Student teachers also conduct peer observations; organized in teams of two or three for the field experiences, peer observation and coaching is required on a weekly basis. In this manner, students are not only learners, they are also facilitators of learning about teaching.

Support is imbedded within the program through consistent communication among the participants. The university supervisor meets each week informally with the cooperating teacher where discussions begin with comments regarding the student teacher's progress and often end with conversations about instructional strategies, curricular issues or student development concerns. The university supervisor also meets with the student teachers, not only in pre- and post-observation conferences, but almost every week for the on-site field seminar. Those meetings with peers often are opportunities to express general concerns and to share pedagogical ideas. It is recommended during the training, that cooperating teachers and student teachers put aside a regularly scheduled daily "conference" time to address the day's happenings as well as future plans, further facilitating communication. Finally, university supervisors also met weekly to exchange information and address issues and/or problems which may have surfaced. None of these 'formal' meetings were long; they were instead intended to keep the lines of communication open.

Results

The question which prompted this exploratory study was whether or not consistent training and support of the participants in supervised field experiences would impact the overall achievement of prospective teachers *and* increase each participants satisfaction with the experience. Perhaps the most notable effect of this training program was the increased involvement among all participants. The university supervisors made more frequent contacts with cooperating teachers addressing issues and problems, as well as discussing the progress of student teachers. The cooperating teacher, in turn, felt less "isolated" and more a part of the process. Student teachers knew what to expect from observations, experienced little anxiety during observations, and were secure as they received both positive and critical feedback.

The cooperating teachers expressed appreciation for the training in supervision processes, both face-to-face and through the audio-tape. Comments included:

> ***The [training] conferences have given me valuable information to work with my student ...[and] good feedback from the supervisor so all of us have clear goals in mind ... follow-up meetings were helpful too ...***
>
> ***I enjoyed being able to listen to the [audio-] tape more than once ... I could go back over areas during the quarter ... It was a good way to share information ... I appreciate the convenience ...***

Further, the outcomes of the supervision process, that is the feedback, seemed to be enhanced. The quantity and quality of feedback, at the heart of any effective field experience program especially student teaching, is always a concern. The feedback prospective teachers receive can assist them as they learn and grow, to become more effective teachers. Student

teachers, it has been found, generally prefer the directive approach (Copeland, 1980; Copeland 1982) in the initial stages of professional development. This approach pinpoints problems and offers concrete suggestions and/or solutions, offering advice and support which supplants background experience. Student teachers also express the desire for more, and more consistent, feedback. With appropriate training, cooperating teachers and university supervisors can provide such feedback on a regular basis. Since cooperating teachers are in the position to conference, observe and give feedback more frequently than the university supervisor, opportunities for growth and development are enhanced with knowledge of and skills using specific observation strategies and effective feedback techniques.

> ***We have been able to have some very effective and informative conversations on improvements in the classroom ... I have been able to look for some specific things and hopefully help to improve on weaknesses and praise successes.***
>
> ***The observation [strategies] and forms ... were very helpful ... [they] kept us focused ...***
>
> ***[Daily] observations opened the door for further feedback and discussion ... [at times] it was vital to get positive feedback to him ...***
>
> ***... at first, students wanted to know what and why and how, a more direct approach, a 'give me an answer' approach ... now I ask more open ended questions like "what do you think went well , or did not go as well as you had planned?" ... we are beginning to have some good conversations, with less prompting, about teaching and student learning ... oh, they still want to know what I think, but they now express more clearly what they think ...***

Student teachers, knowing what to expect about their own professional development and

that of their peers, feel less anxious when they experience the "highs and lows" during student teaching. In addition, the support of weekly peer seminars, as well as being paired with a peer in at the field experience building, provided valuable opportunities for collegial exchange on both a personal and professional level. Further, it appears that in some cases, students who work together, observing and conferencing, quickly become reflective about their own teaching.

> ***... by observing someone else, I learned that I am not the only one experiencing all this anxiety, joy, frustration, and euphoria ... it was nice to hear another novice teacher's perspective ...***
>
> ***... we have a rule, in the morning we talk about something we are really excited to do, and after school we talk about something that was really funny that happened during the day ...[this way] we can help each other when we are feeling frustrated and over-worked ...***
>
> ***Being able to see someone at the same level as me ... helps me gauge my performance ... even when we've been in the same classes at [the university], we developed different styles almost from the start ...***
>
> ***... [my team peer] has been a great support for me. We talk over ideas, frustrations, and plans ... it's good to have someone to bounce ideas off of ...***

Specific observation strategies were also a focus of this investigation. The *guided action* or *bug-in-the-ear* (BIE) strategy (Giebelhaus & Cruz, 1992, 1994; Giebelhaus, 1994) was a required strategy in the first weeks of student teaching. This very directive approach employs a small, one-way communication device which allows the observer to prompt the student teacher on specific aspects of instruction while teaching. While located in the back of the room, the observer uses one or two word cues to focus the student teacher's attention on aspects of content, behavior

management, or pedagogy. The advantages to employing this strategy include the ability to make corrections or suggestions without disturbing the flow of the lesson or undermining the "authority" of the student teacher and to do so at the time it occurs, eliminating the often ineffective, retrospective approach to critical feedback. The BIE is used by all participants in the observer role; that is, the cooperating teacher and the university supervisor use the BIE with the student teacher and the student teachers use it with their peer. Indications are that all participants generally are pleased with the effectiveness of the strategy. It not only allows for correction or support at the time of the instruction, but it tends to focus the post-observation conferences as well.

> ***I feel comfortable wearing it because it works! It make [my cooperating teacher] and I work together ... The kids respect it too!***
>
> ***... the BIE is great for questioning techniques ... I don't worry so much about making mistakes ...***
>
> ***I can see it being very useful in helping [the student teacher] to expand upon questioning knowledge of the students ...***

Problems with the BIE do exist, perhaps not so much with the approach as with the device itself and the level of training. Some teachers and student teachers wonder if the device is too sensitive, picking up "hall noise" or other environmental distractions and while most triad members find it very useful, others see it as having only moderate success. One of the problems seems to be the amount of information which can be relayed; if there are major difficulties occurring during instruction such as errors in content knowledge, that cannot be as readily addressed using the BIE. It is quite possible, however, that if the BIE were not being used, focusing the observers

attention on what was happening in the classroom, this type of difficulty would not be noticed. The BIE strategy appears to be especially helpful when the student teacher and observer are focused on questioning strategies; the observer can actually prompt a specific question intended to elicit student responses beyond the simple knowledge level.

Finally, cooperating teachers expressed appreciation for having the training which allowed for greater communication and learning. Cooperating teachers generally accept student teachers out of a 'generative' desire to help a young person entering the profession. Yet, all too frequently they do not have the tools or the support to ensure a rewarding and satisfying experience. A training program which is embedded with regular communication from the university provides not only learning, but satisfaction as well.

> ***I found this experience to be helpful to me as well ... thanks for working with me ...***
>
> ***This is a wonderful experience for me. It is certainly helping me to become a better teacher...***

Discussion

Over twenty years ago, Patty (1973) predicted that university personnel would be replaced by cooperating teachers in the supervision of pre-service teachers. Today, the Holmes Group (1986) is suggesting a similar idea with the Professional Development Schools (PDS) and Master Teacher concepts. Supervision, the forgotten step-child of teacher education is maligned in the literature as unreflective and ineffective (Tabachnick, et al. 1979), attended to by persons who are uncertain of their role or the expectations of the experience (Boothroyd, 1979; Bowman, 1979) and lacking a theoretical and conceptual framework. (McIntyre, 1983) No wonder some have

suggested that supervision is a "dead-end" career move for those in higher education. Instead of attacking the problem, perhaps the mood is to abandon it. Our work with cooperating teachers and student teachers suggest there is a better way.

As the primary agent in the education and preparation of prospective teachers, teacher educators must take a proactive stance determining what is needed to realize the great potential from field experiences. The literature does provide some suggestions on preparation of prospective cooperating teachers through various training programs, but it is limited at best. A more frequently addressed issue is the lack of communication within supervision. This paper has described an effort to web the two - training and communication or support - together to create more effective learning opportunities for all the participants in field experience supervision. Evidence is presented here that would suggest that it is possible to prepare field-based participants for an experience that does not merely support the status quo, that is not plagued with imitation, that encourages taking supervised instructional risks, that communicates realistic expectations, and where the kinds of feedback given is developmentally appropriate.

Perhaps the best recommendation that can come from this article is that teacher educators must not just abandon supervision to the field-based school personnel. Instead we should use supervision as an entry key for establishing better communication and true partnerships with the schools in which our students will someday teach.

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